

Event 1

# The Living Bank: A Symposium on Global Crop Diversity

*A half-day symposium exploring how the world's largest banana genebank underpins global food security, nature-positive value chains, and climate-resilient agriculture, connecting scientists, policymakers, and citizens in Leuven.*

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| <b>Date</b>         | Friday, 5 June 2026  |
| <b>Time</b>         | 13:30 - 17:00  |
| <b>Venue</b>        | Leuven, Belgium  |
| <b>Format</b>       | Symposium: keynote presentations, panel discussion, networking reception hosted by the City of Leuven  |
| <b>Language</b>     | English  |
| <b>Admission</b>    | Free and open to all; pre-registration required  |
| <b>Organised by</b> | Multifunctional Landscape Science Program, CGIAR<br>City of Leuven   |
| <b>Partners</b>     | KU Leuven, Meise Botanic Garden, COLEAD, FAO World Banana Forum, DG AGRI, Broederlijk Delen, The Food Bridge vzw, ENoLL (European Network of Living Labs), Climate KIC |

## About This Event

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What does investing in nature actually look like? Sometimes it looks like 1,700 banana varieties growing in a laboratory in Leuven. The Musa genebank, managed by the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT (CGIAR) under FAO mandate and hosted at KU Leuven, is one of humanity's most important investments in nature. As the world's largest collection of banana and plantain genetic diversity, it holds accessions from approximately 40 countries and has distributed samples to over 120 countries. It safeguards against crop disease, climate change, and the silent erosion of the agricultural biodiversity that farmers, food systems, and communities depend on.

On this open afternoon, the CGIAR Multifunctional Landscapes Science Programme invite the public, students, researchers, farmers, policymakers, and businesses to explore what investing in agrobiodiversity means in practice. Structured as a nature-positive value chain dialogue, the symposium shows how scientific assets in Leuven provide global market security, with Leuven as a strategic choice: a world-class environment where the science, the city, and the university converge to create a nature-positive model for Europe.

## Objectives

- Position the CGIAR Multifunctional Landscapes Science Programme as the lead scientific authority connecting genebank assets to landscape-level food system resilience.
- Raise public awareness of the Musa genebank as a global common good held in trust for humanity under the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, and demonstrate the concrete returns on investing in crop genetic diversity for food security, farming resilience, and climate adaptation.
- Convene a cross-sectoral panel bringing together EU policy, local government, academia, trade, and civil society in a structured public dialogue on the value of agrobiodiversity as natural capital.

- Contribute to the EU Green Week 2026 theme: investing in nature, rewarding for people and business.

## Agenda

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| <b>13:30</b> | Doors open. Registration and coffee. Exhibition and crop diversity showcase accessible.  |
| <b>14:00</b> | Opening welcome: CGIAR Multifunctional Landscapes Science Program and City of Leuven.  |
| <b>14:05</b> | Strategic introduction by Lulseged Tamene Desta, Director, CGIAR Multifunctional Landscapes Science Programme (virtual, pending confirmation).   |
| <b>14:20</b> | <p>Research, policy, and governance: ‘The Living Bank: biological insurance, natural capital, and the future of food.’, with contributions (7 minutes each) from</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prof. Joëlle Mühlemann (KU Leuven, Division of Crop Biotechnics)</li> <li>• Thomas Van Oppens (Deputy Mayor, City of Leuven)</li> <li>• DG AGRI representative</li> <li>• Bart Panis and Sebastien Carpentier (Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT) and FAO World Banana Forum (remote)</li> <li>• Meise Botanic Garden</li> <li>• Climate KIC</li> </ul> <p>Followed by Q&amp;A facilitated by Carlo Fadda.</p> |
| <b>15:30</b> | <p>Knowledge-sharing presentations (7 minutes each): organisations working on nature-positive food solutions, deforestation-free value chains, seed systems, and community resilience, with contribution from</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carlo Fadda (Multifunctional Landscapes Science Programme, Nature Positive Solutions)</li> <li>• Broederlijk Delen</li> <li>• The Food Bridge vzw</li> <li>• ENoLL (European Network of Living Labs).</li> </ul> <p>Open dialogue on the case studies.</p>  |
| <b>16:15</b> | Open dialogue: ‘What would it take to invest in nature at scale?’ Facilitated by Carlo Fadda. Closing remarks.   |
| <b>17:00</b> | Close.   |

## Speakers and Partners

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### Confirmed Speakers

- Carlo Fadda, Director of Biodiversity for Food & Agriculture, Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT (CGIAR MFL SP) - panel moderator and scientific thread.
- Sebastien Carpentier, Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT - Banana Programme Leader and panellist.
- Bart Panis, Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT - Musa Genebank Manager and panellist.
- Lulseged Tamene Desta, Director, CGIAR Multifunctional Landscapes Science Programme - strategic introduction framing the Musa genebank as a global natural capital anchor for the 2025–2030 portfolio.

- Prof. Joëlle Mühlemann, KU Leuven, Division of Crop Biotechnics - explaining how biotechnological research converts genetic diversity into climate-resilient solutions.

## Partner Organisations

- KU Leuven, Division of Crop Biotechnics - plant genetic resources, agrobiodiversity science, and biotechnological research; host institution.
- City of Leuven - local food strategy, Korte Keten policy, and host of the closing reception.
- Meise Botanic Garden - botanical conservation, crop wild relatives, and deforestation-free value chains.
- FAO World Banana Forum - global value chains and food security (remote).
- DG AGRI - EU research missions and nature-positive European agriculture policy.
- Broederlijk Delen and The Food Bridge vzw - seed justice, diaspora engagement, and the rights of producers safeguarding agrobiodiversity.
- Climate KIC
- ENoLL (European Network of Living Labs)

## Planning Note

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This event contributes to the EU Green Week 2026 theme of investing in nature, rewarding for people and business, and aligns with the following Green Week themes: Biodiversity, Sustainable agriculture, Nature-based solutions, Ecosystem services, Innovation, Bioeconomy, Management of natural resources, and Sustainable economic growth strategy.

*Prepared by Yu-Chun (Patty) Liao | May 2026 | Multifunctional Landscapes Science Program, CGIAR*